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Good Morning, Senator Slossberg, Representative Spallone, and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. My name is Luisa Soboleski from Southington and I am the chairperson of the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired. I am here today to testify in opposition to HB 6375, an Act Concerning Review and Termination of Certain Boards and Commissions

The Connecticut Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired (CDHI) has been in operation for almost 35 years. The Commission was the first Commission on the Deaf established nationally and serves as the model for others, even today. CDHI currently provides critical services to the community such as advocacy, counseling and certified sign language interpreting services. CDHI also monitors the statewide registry (State Statute Sec. 46a-33a) of Connecticut working sign language interpreters insuring that only "qualified" interpreters are active in the community.

There is a nationwide shortage of certified and qualified sign language interpreters. Connecticut is fortunate to have secured the talents of the 45 part-time interpreters. Interpreting services are reimbursable and the reimbursements are paid to the 45 interpreters for their work. The interpreting service is, for the most part, self supporting.

Regarding the CDHI Interpreting Department:

Last Year 2008

- **CDHI provided coverage for 16,600 interpreting assignments; or approximately 66,400 hours of interpreting** – this is a modest and rough estimate of service provided – these hours are split among the 45 part-time interpreters.
- **Seventy-Five Percent of those 16,600 assignments: 11,620 interpreting assignments** were connected to services provided to **State of Connecticut agencies and/or pertained to State of Connecticut related business**

As you are aware, Federal and State Laws [American with Disability Act (ADA)], mandate that the rights of citizens, including those with disabilities, be protected. CDHI has historically been the resource accessed by State of Connecticut agencies in their efforts to meet their legal obligations to provide equal access to goods and services provided by the State. CDHI has responded whenever logistically possible in this matter; especially when public health and welfare are affected. Much of the CDHI business to the State can be considered “short notice” work. The State of Connecticut Judicial Department, Department of Children and Families, State Police, Department of Corrections are examples of “short notice” requesting agencies; DCF and state police for crisis events and Judicial for court related business.

Let's take a snapshot of a typical week just, **Last week**

907 total hours of interpreting were provided

- 11 cases before the courts, 70.5 hours of interpreting

- **Four (4) of which dealt with foreclosure mediations.**
- 16 active DCF cases CDHI provided 64 hours of interpreting
- 18 CVH/Corrections interpreting assignments equaling 48 hours of time
- 30 employment appointments totaling 101 hours of interpreting.
- 114 college classes interpreted for a total of 380 hours.

Let me take just a minute to share a personal account. As a Deaf individual, I truly know the importance of this agency. I grew up in a different time, when our legal rights were limited. I went through school without interpreters, facing barriers and frustrations every day. I was fortunate to have caring, supportive Deaf parents so at home I was provided with the communication access that was lacking in my school day. I persevered through high school, college, and graduate school so that I could become a teacher and help future generations of Deaf students. But I am the exception; there are many more Deaf people who could not reach their goals, held back not by lack of ability, but lack of opportunity. My own children are also Deaf and have grown up in a time when their basic rights to communication access and equal opportunity are protected by state and federal laws. Qualified CDHI interpreters played a critical role in their education in the Southington Public School system, giving them access to the same curriculum as their hearing peers. This is just one example of how CDHI protects the rights of the Deaf citizens of Connecticut. The elimination of CDHI would be a drastic step backward, putting back up the barriers that we worked so hard to remove for our children and future generations to come.

All in all, CDHI is a small State of Connecticut agency making an enormous impact! Agency statistics document its importance. CDHI interpreting services cannot be duplicated by any other State or private agency. Elimination of CDHI will negatively impact the Deaf citizens of Connecticut as well as severely disrupt statewide operations at the State Judicial Department, Department of Children and Families, Department of Corrections, Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, the State College and Community College system, State Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, and so on and so on. It would be difficult to name an agency that CDHI has not assisted. Upon review, you will agree elimination makes little sense.

Thank you for your time.